

of illicit drugs may be unavoidable at times however it is not unpredictable. Meticulous risk assessment with use of an appropriate observation period by a vigilant forensic physician is essential to safeguard the wellbeing of the detained body-stuffer and avert deaths in custody.

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Available online 20 July 2007

Racist aggression towards FMEs

Sir,

Recent comments from Judge Paul Darlow in Exeter Crown Court (Exeter, UK) create a troubling impression. As reported in The Times, the court heard that a 36-year-old detainee who had asked to see a doctor, told the forensic physician (FP) "I want an English doctor, not a f***ing Paki".¹ The FP described how the detainee had "lunged" at him. The judge told the man "Next time call him a fat bastard and do not say anything about his colour." He went on to explain that given the situation, comments made by a "drunk" towards the FP could not be deemed to be "seriously upsetting abuse". Doctors from a variety of ethnic backgrounds working in the UK will consider Judge Darlow's attitude to be quite peculiar and not in keeping with current opinion. This is particularly the case, considering that he made his remarks in the same week that Jade Goody almost created an international incident after allegedly racist remarks on television Channel 4's Celebrity Big Brother television programme! Equally surprising, perhaps is the way that the judge implies that it is acceptable to direct verbal aggression of a non-racist nature towards doctors at work. There are limited data in the clinical forensic setting although studies have been undertaken over a decade ago, but the full extent of aggression being directed towards healthcare workers in various settings appears to be gradually being realised.^{2–5} I believe that medical and

legal professionals at every level need to take this problem seriously in order that it may be tackled.

Declaration of interest

I work as a forensic physician in a neighbouring county.

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Available online 20 July 2007